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HEALTH

USAID Program Graduates 23 Midwives in

Jawzjan Province: On October 18, Jawzjan province celebrated the graduation of 23 new midwives from a USAID-supported midwifery education program. The skilled midwives will be deployed back to their communities and will work from health facilities, some of them in very remote areas. They will provide care to approximately 345,000 mothers and children throughout Jawzjan, improving infant and maternal health while reducing mortality rates.

The recruitment and training of midwives throughout the country is central to improving maternal and child health in Afghanistan. USAID funds eight of Afghanistan's community midwifery programs and two hospital-based programs. All programs are



These graduating midwives will reach 345,000 mothers and children throughout lawzian.

PHOTO: USAID/Uruj Perwaiz

accredited by the National Midwifery Education Accreditation Board to ensure they maintain high professional standards. Thanks to these programs and other health initiatives by U.S. and international donors, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, the infant mortality rate has fallen 22 percent since 2002.



Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Asif Rahimi toured the factory and observed the production of juice.

PHOTO: ASAP/lan F. Carver

AGRICULTURE

Afghanistan's First Juice Factory Opens:

Afghanistan produces some of the world's tastiest fruit and has the potential to spread its agricultural wealth around the world. On October 15, 2009, the Omaid Bahar Fruit Processing Company opened the first juice factory in Afghanistan. Funded by USAID, the factory employs approximately 200 workers, many of whom are women. Omaid Bahar will buy fruit, including pomegranates, apples, and apricots, from approximately 50,000 Afghan farmers throughout the country. The factory already has contracts for its products with companies in India and the Middle East, and is negotiating additional contracts with European and North American firms.

At the launch event, Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Asif Rahimi noted that the factory was essential for Afghanistan's stability and economic growth. "If you want to

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see what Afghanistan's agricultural future will be, look here," he stated. "This is the beginning."

INFRASTRUCTURE

New Sanitation and Water Supply Program to Help Rural Afghan Communities: Only 12 percent of Afghans living in rural areas have access to clean, safe drinking water. However, thanks to a new USAID program called Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation (SWSS), more than 1,000 rural communities will soon have better access to potable water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene-education programs. These activities will improve people's health, encourage better hygiene practices, and reduce cases of waterborne disease.



Potable water supply is a fundamental public service for rural Afghans and contributes to improved health and quality of life.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

The project will support national and local government agencies, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs),

and other stakeholders to design, install, and operate these systems – mostly in southern and eastern Afghanistan. "The strong link with Provincial Reconstruction Teams that SWSS provides represents a novel approach for USAID, giving us tremendous outreach into rural communities throughout Afghanistan," stated USAID representative John Smith-Sreen. "This will allow USAID to address some of the country's most pressing water and sanitation needs while ensuring local participation and engagement in the process."



Hilmand MPs discuss issues of the day with constituents via radio.

PHOTO: USAID/APAP

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Members of Parliament Connect with Constituents in Insecure Provinces: The security situation in parts of Afghanistan has made it increasingly difficult for Afghan members of parliament (MPs) to maintain contact with their constituents. To connect citizens with their government and improve MPs' responsiveness to their constituents, USAID created a radio roundtable series between MPs in Kabul and citizens in the provinces.

To maximize public engagement in the exchanges, USAID designs the radio programs to ensure that they embody participatory democratic methods. Each

roundtable is publicized through solicitations for participant nominees and discussion topics. A small group of nominees then receive training on media skills, and they can then

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participate in the studio discussion or call in with questions during the live 1.5 hour broadcast. A half-hour edited version is later broadcast nationally on Salam Watandar during primetime.

The facilitated discussions proved very popular with citizens eager to have their say in Afghan politics, and the MPs are grateful for this new form of access to their constituents. According to roundtable host and Sabawoon Helmand Radio manager, Merwais Patsoon, the station has received numerous requests from listeners for additional programs. Hilmand MP Nasima Niazi said of her experience on the radio, "I was very happy that my constituents could talk to me live without any security threat. People who live in far, undeveloped areas were able to hear the voices of their MPs. This is an excellent step toward a good future for Hilmand."

At a time when citizens' confidence in their representatives and governing institutions is vital to stability, increased interaction is essential. USAID will continue to conduct roundtables in Afghanistan's most prohibitive environments.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

Khaneshin's Community Center and Bazaar Come Back to Life: In Khaneshin district of Hilmand province, the 300-year-old community center was once the focal point of the village. However, years of Taliban occupation and insurgent activity led to the center's decay, and citizens were unable to use it. Last month, the district governor mobilized citizens to rehabilitate the community center with funding from USAID. The residents of Khaneshin now



The Khaneshin Bazaar is a clean place to shop following sanitation work.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

have a proper forum to meet with their peers and government officials to address community needs, improving a formerly negative perception of the national government.

Additionally, the local bazaar has undergone a revival. After a five-year absence of government services, the bazaar was in a state of disrepair and neglect. Immediately after an outbreak of violence, USAID employed 22 young men to clean the bazaar every day. This has re-established the bazaar as a center of commerce and community, improving the daily lives of the people while providing gainful employment to youth who might otherwise be attracted to the insurgency. This project also formed the basis for a proposed permanent municipal sanitation department, which would be operated by the district government — further demonstrating that the government aims to serve its citizens.

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GENDER

Strengthening the Capacity of Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs: The United States is committed to removing constraints on women's potential because their participation in rebuilding Afghanistan is essential. To build the capacity of Afghan government officials to advocate effectively for women's rights and needs, USAID recently provided two seven-day training courses for 70 Department of Women's Affairs (DOWA) staff from all 34 provinces. Departments of Women's Affairs operate at the provincial level, carrying out the crucial mandate of women's advancement throughout the country.



The training for Departments of Women's Affairs was highly interactive, with lots of discussion and role playing.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Ms. Amena, director of the Nimroz Department of Women's Affairs, stated "We have learned a lot during the training. The part that I found most interesting was on identification of women's problems, [as well as] methods of [conveying] them to the government and other stakeholders for resource mobilization purposes. In addition, we have learned that advocacy is a good method...for helping vulnerable women." Following the training, Ms. Amena and her colleagues will share what they learned with other DOWA staff members, leading to improved public resource monitoring and increased community mobilization for the betterment of women at the local level.



Ms. Farzia Sabzwary from the Kabul University Research Center (left) with IT course instructor Talwasa Khairkhwa (right). PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

EDUCATION

Afghan Faculty Members Learn Basic IT Skills: In mid-October 2009, 10 faculty members and 100 students at Kabul University successfully completed a 14-week course in information technology. The course was specifically designed to meet the needs of Afghan lecturers who have little or no experience using a personal computer or the Internet. Covering software installation, Internet use, and Open Office applications, the course taught faculty members to use e-mail, search the Internet for reliable information, design and format course chapters, set-up a table with formulas, and create professional presentations.

Ms. Farzia Sabzwary from the Kabul University Research Center and Prof. Sayed Rahimullah from the Faculty of Veterinary Science were among the first faculty members to complete the IT course. Ms. Sabzwary is already using her training to design publications



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and course materials for lecturers at the KU Research Center. She has since purchased a personal computer and looks forward to improving her computer skills through practice and advanced IT classes. Prof. Rahimullah is using his skills to access information about veterinary science on the Internet and to develop presentations for his students.